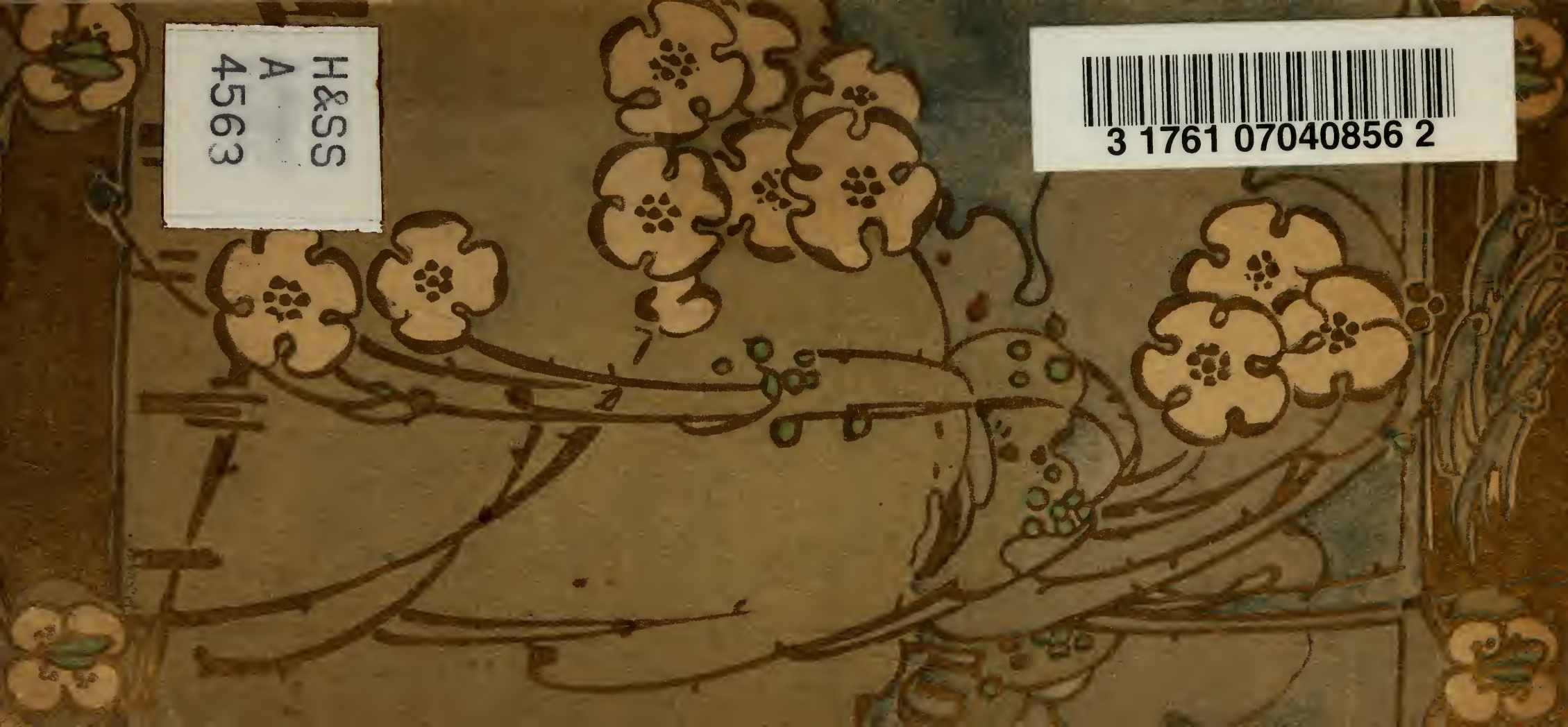


H&SS
A
4563

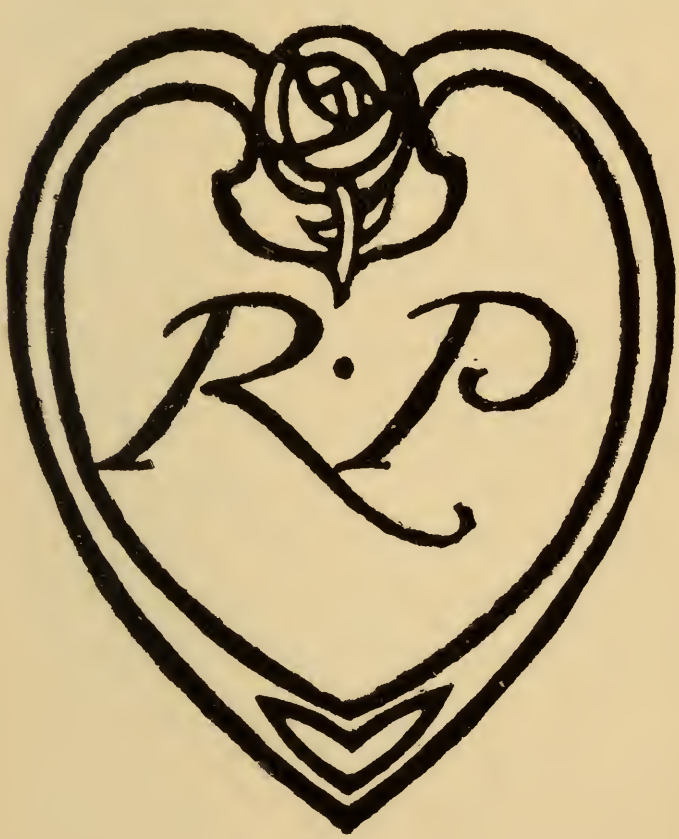
3 1761 07040856 2

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Toronto

http://www.archive.org/details/blesseddamoze00ross

THE BLESSED DAMOZEL MY SISTER'S SLEEP ETC. BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

THE BLESSED DAMOZEL



T. N. FOULIS, 13 & 15 FREDERICK ST., EDINBURGH: & 23 BEDFORD STREET, LONDON, W.C.

LIBRARY
AUG 10 1966
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

1104387

THE BLESSED DAMOZEL

I

THE blessed Damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven:
Her blue grave eyes were deeper much
Than a deep water, even.
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

II

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift
On the neck meetly worn;
And her hair, lying down her back,
Was yellow like ripe corn.

III

Herseemed she scarce had been
a day
One of God's choristers;
The wonder was not yet quite
gone
From that still look of hers;
Albeit to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

IV

(To *one* it is ten years of years
. . . Yet now, here in this place
Surely she leaned o'er me,—her
hair
Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing: the Autumn-fall of
leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)

V

It was the terrace of God's house
That she was standing on,—
By God built over the sheer depth
In which Space is begun;
So high, that looking downward
thence,
She could scarce see the sun.

VI

It lies from Heaven across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and blackness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.

VII

But in those tracts, with her, it was
The peace of utter light
And silence. For no breeze may stir
Along the steady flight
Of seraphim; no echo there,
Beyond all depth or height.

VIII

Heard hardly, some of her new friends,
Playing at holy games,
Spake, gentle-mouthed, among themselves,
Their virginal chaste names;
And the souls, mounting up to God,
Went by her like thin flames.

IX

And still she bowed herself, and stooped
Into the vast waste calm;
Till her bosom's pressure must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

X

From the fixt lull of heaven, she saw
Time, like a pulse, shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove,
In that steep gulph, to pierce
The swarm: and then she spake, as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

XI

"I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come," she said.
"Have I not prayed in solemn heaven?
On earth, has he not prayed?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?

XII

"When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand, and go with him
To the deep wells of light,
And we will step down as to a stream
And bathe there in God's sight.

XIII

"We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps tremble continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And where each need, revealed, expects
Its patient period.

XIV

"We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree,
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Sometimes is felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His name audibly.

XV

"And I myself will teach to him—
I myself, lying so—
The songs I sing here; which his mouth
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
Finding some knowledge at each pause
And some new thing to know."

XVI

(Alas! to *her* wise simple mind
These things were all but known
Before: they trembled on her sense,—
Her voice had caught their tone.
Alas for lonely Heaven! Alas
For life wrung out alone!

XVII

Alas, and though the end were reached? . . .
Was *thy* part understood
Or borne in trust? And for her sake
Shall this too be found good?—
May the close lips that knew not prayer
Praise ever, though they would?)

XVIII

"We two," she said, "will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies:—
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret, and Rosalys.

XIX

"Circle-wise sit they, with bound locks
And bosoms coveréd;
Into the fine cloth, white like flame,
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for them
Who are just born, being dead.

XX

"He shall fear haply, and be dumb.
Then I will lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

XXI

"Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To Him round whom all souls
Kneel—the unnumber'd solemn heads
Bowed with their aureoles:
And Angels, meeting us, shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.

XXII

"There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:—
To have more blessing than on earth
In nowise; but to be
As then we were,—being as then
At peace. Yea, verily.

XXIII

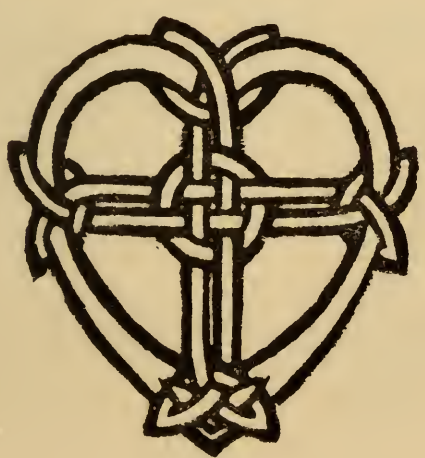
"Yea, verily; when he is come
We will do thus and thus:
Till this my vigil seem quite strange
And almost fabulous;
We two will live at once, one life;
And peace shall be with us."

XXIV

She gazed, and listened, and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild:
"All this is when he comes."
She ceased;
The light thrilled past her, filled
With Angels, in strong level lapse.
Her eyes prayed, and she smiled,

XXV

(I saw her smile.) But soon their flight
Was vague 'mid the poised spheres.
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)



MY SISTER'S SLEEP.

I

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve,
Upon her eyes' most patient calms
The lids were shut; her uplaid arms
Covered her bosom, I believe.

II

Our mother, who had leaned all day
Over the bed from chime to chime,
Then raised herself for the first time,
And as she sat her down, did pray.

III

Her little work-table was spread
With work to finish. For the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed.

IV

Without, there was a good moon up,
Which left its shadows far within;
The depth of light that it was in
Seemed hollow like an altar-cup.

V

Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fire-shine drove
And reddened. In its dim alcove
The mirror shed a clearness round.

VI

I had been sitting up some nights,
And my tir'd mind felt weak and blank;
Like a sharp strengthening wine, it drank
The stillness and the broken lights.

VII

Silence was speaking at my side
With an exceedingly clear voice:
I knew the calm as of a choice
Made in God for me, to abide.

VIII

I said, "Full knowledge does not grieve:
This which upon my spirit dwells
Perhaps would have been sorrow else:
But I am glad 'tis Christmas Eve."

IX

Twelve struck. That sound, which all the years
Hear in each hour, crept off; and then
The ruffled silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.

X

Our mother rose from where she sat.
Her needles, as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled: no other noise than that.

XI

"Glory unto the Newly Born!"
So, as said angels, she did say;
Because we were in Christmas-day,
Though it would still be long till dawn.

XII

She stood a moment with her hands
Kept in each other, praying much;
A moment that the soul may touch
But the heart only understands.

XIII

Almost unwittingly, my mind
  Repeated her words after her;
  Perhaps tho' my lips did not stir;
It was scarce thought, or cause assign'd.

XIV

Just then in the room over us
  There was a pushing back of chairs,
  As some who had sat unawares
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

XV

Anxious, with softly stepping haste,
  Our mother went where Margaret lay,
  Fearing the sounds o'erhead —should they
Have broken her long-watched for rest!

XVI

She stooped an instant, calm, and turned;
But suddenly turned back again;
And all her features seemed in pain
With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.

XVII

For my part, I but hid my face,
And held my breath, and spake no word:
There was none spoken; but I *heard*
The silence for a little space.

XVIII

Our mother bowed herself and wept.
And both my arms fell, and I said:
"God knows I knew that she was dead."
And there, all white, my sister slept.

XIX

Then kneeling, upon Christmas
morn
A little after twelve o'clock
We said, ere the first quarter
struck,
"Christ's blessing on the newly
born!"

FROM THE CLIFFS: NOON

I

The sea is in its listless chime:
Time's lapse it is, made audible,—
The murmur of the earth's large shell.
In a sad blueness beyond rhyme
It ends : sense, without thought, can pass
No stadium further. Since time was,
This sound hath told the lapse of time.

II

No stagnance that death wins, —it hath
The mournfulness of ancient life,
Always enduring at dull Strife.
As the world's heart of rest and wrath,
Its painful pulse is in the sands.

Last utterly, the whole sky stands,
Grey and not known, along its path.

PAX VOBIS

I

'Tis of the Father Hilary.
He strove, but could not pray: so took
The darkened stair, where his feet shook
A sad blind echo. He kept up
Slowly. 'Twas a chill sway of air
That autumn noon within the stair,
Sick, dizzy, like a turning cup.
His brain perplexed him, void and thin:
He shut his eyes and felt it spin;
The obscure deafness hemmed him in.
He said: "The air is calm outside."

II

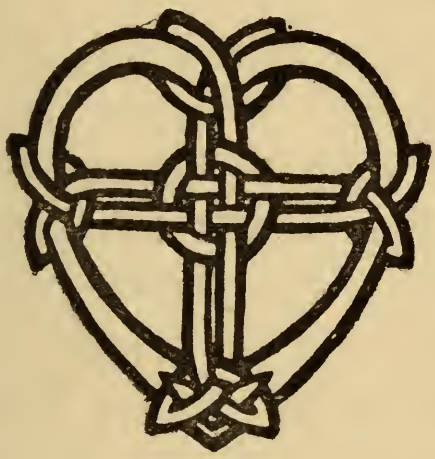
He leaned unto the gallery
Where the chime keeps the night and day:

It hurt his brain,—he could not pray.
He had his face upon the stone:
Deep 'twixt the narrow shafts, his eye
Passed all the roofs unto the sky
Whose greyness the wind swept alone.
Close by his feet he saw it shake
With wind in pools that the rains make:
The ripple set his eyes to ache.
He said, "Calm hath its peace outside."

III

He stood within the mystery
Girding God's blessed Eucharist:
The organ and the chaunt had ceased:
A few words paused against his ear,
Said from the altar: drawn round him,
The silence was at rest and dim.
He could not pray. The Bell shook clear

And ceased. All was great awe,
—the breath
Of God in man, that warranteth
Wholly the inner things of Faith.
He said: "There is the world
outside."



NOTE

The Poems which go to make up this, the second of the *Roses of Parnassus,* were written by Rossetti when a youth, and first published in *The Germ,* in 1850. They were afterwards subjected to careful revision in many minor details before they re-appeared in the still copyright Edition of his *Poems,* published in 1881. The reprint in this volume, therefore, is from the original version of the poems, and for this reason has a value all its own, apart from any interest one may feel in the critical question whether the original or the later version is to be preferred. Any one wishing to compare the variations should note that *Pax Vobis* was afterwards reprinted as *World's Worth* and *From the Cliffs: Noon,* as *Sea Limits.* The titles of *The Blessed Damozel,* and *My Sister's Sleep,* remain unchanged.

THIS EDITION OF THE BLESSED DAMOZEL AND OTHER POEMS BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, IS THE SECOND OF THE 'ROSES OF PARNASSUS.'

ROSES OF PARNASSUS

A TASTEFULLY PRODUCED SERIES OF REPRINTS OF CLASSICS OF POETIC LITERATURE: DAINTY AND ARTISTIC IN FORM AND BEAUTIFULLY PRINTED IN THREE STYLES OF BINDING: AT 6D NET, 1/- NET, AND 2/6 NET

I. RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM

II. THE BLESSED DAMOZEL, ETC., BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

III. THE WHITE ROSE ANTHOLOGY: LYRICS OF LOVE

IV. THE RED ROSE ANTHOLOGY: LYRICS OF THE JOY OF LOVE

V. THE YELLOW ROSE ANTHOLOGY: LYRICS OF LOVE FORLORN

VI. THE ODES OF JOHN KEATS

VII. THE SENSITIVE PLANT, ETC., BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

VIII. A DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN ETC., BY LORD TENNYSON

IX. RABBI BEN EZRA AND ABT VOGLER: BY ROBERT BROWNING

X. AN ELIZABETHAN GARLAND

XI. THE ANCIENT MARINER

XII. THE SELECTED POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

XIII. HAFIZ, THE PRINCE OF PERSIAN LYRIC POETS

XIV. POEMS OF LONGFELLOW

XV. LOVE SONNETS OF E. B. BROWNING

XVI. THE SCHOLAR GIPSY, BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

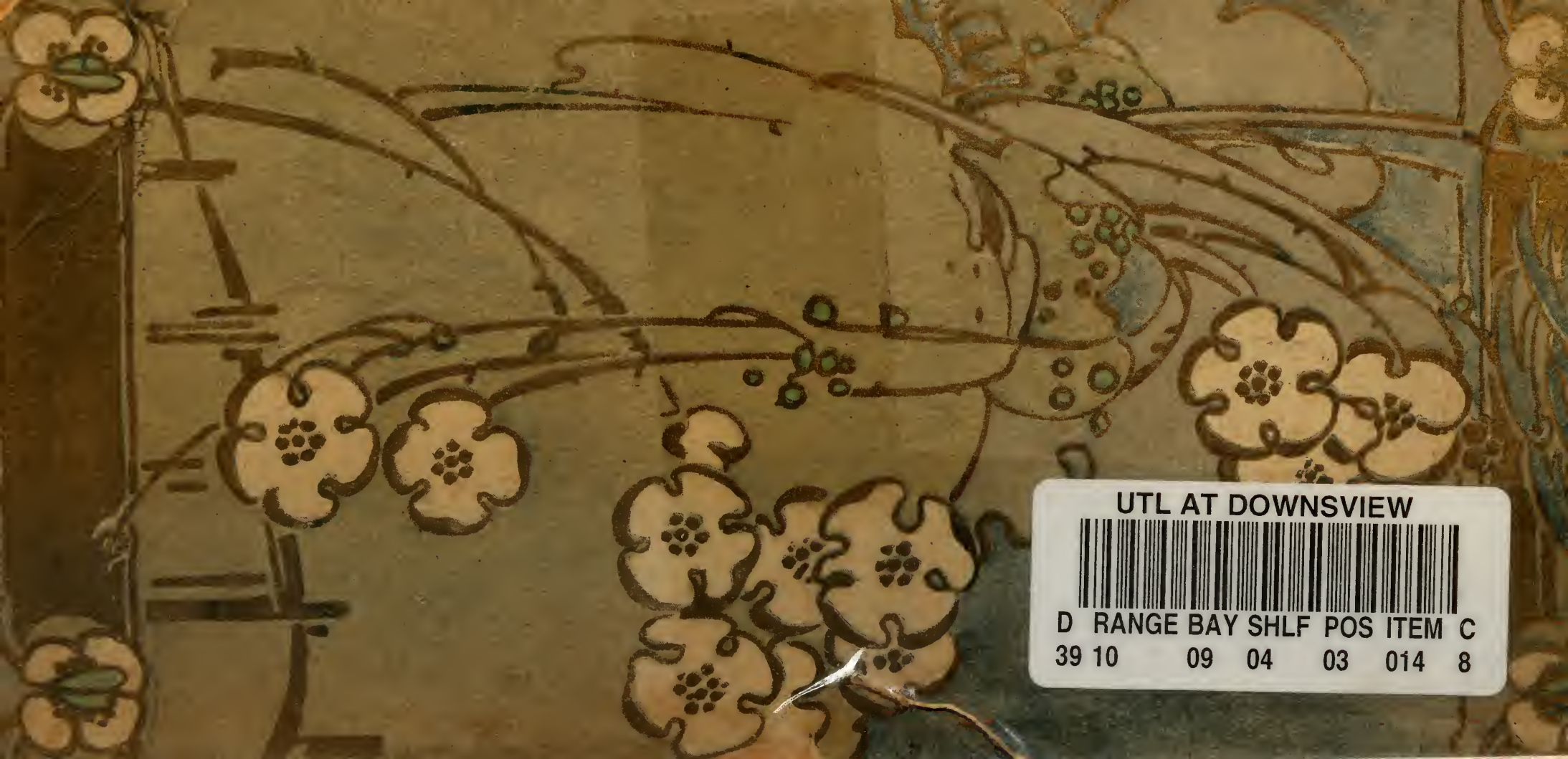
XVII. POEMS OF ADELAIDE PROCTER

CATALOGUE OF DAINTY EDITIONS ON APPLICATION

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

H&SS
A
4563



UTL AT DOWNSVIEW
D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C
39 10 09 04 03 014 8